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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - GARBLED TEXT PARA 12

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SUBJECT: UAE CONCESSIONS THREATENS BOMA-JONGLEI BIODIVERSITY

KHARTOUM 00000911 001.2 OF 002

SUMMARY

¶11. (U) SUMMARY: Despite stiff requirements for consultation with and preapproval of projects by the Government of Southern Sudan's Ministry of Wildlife (MOW), the United Arab Emirates (UAE) ecotourism company, Al Ain National Wildlife Establishment has, without authorization, built a two-kilometer airport facility. The latter can accommodate international flights, and includes numerous hotel facilities, and will also include an extensive road network through the pristine wildlife areas of Boma National Park. The MOW's Bureau of Conservation has recommended that the MOW suspend the project until a land use plan is developed to better protect core areas of the park, and preserve critical migratory routes and breeding areas. USAID's USD 12.6 million project to MOW and the Wildlife Conservation Society for preservation of the biodiversity in Boma-Jonglei will be undermined if the GOSS does not act on this issue. END SUMMARY.

GOSS-WCS PARTNER TO PROTECT PARK

¶12. (U) Southern Sudan's Boma-Jonglei landscape attracted international attention in June 2007 when media, including the New York Times, published the findings of a wildlife survey jointly carried out by scientists from GOSS, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and the National Geographic Society. Supported by a grant from USAID, this initial survey was the first wildlife study to be carried out in Southern Sudan after 22 years of civil warfare. Findings made front page news when the study revealed that Southern Sudan is home to vast herds of migratory gazelle and antelope, the scale of which rivals the famed wildebeest herds of Tanzania's Serengeti Plains. Results of the survey estimated these herds at more than a million mammals - ranking Southern Sudan's animal migration as one of the two largest on earth.

¶13. (U) Overall, these important findings also indicated that Southern Sudan is one of the most biodiverse regions in Africa. It consists of the largest freshwater wetland in the world as well as pristine savannas and is home to significant populations of classic African wildlife including elephants, giraffes, zebras, ostriches, lions, leopards, buffalos and hundreds of bird species.

¶14. (U) Traditional ethnic groups throughout Jonglei State and parts of Eastern Equatoria State have strong ties to wildlife and live off the land. Conservation and related livelihoods programs for, and

with, these ethnic groups could also support conflict prevention goals.

¶15. (U) In response to these important survey findings, GOSS and the Ministry of Wildlife signed a formal agreement with WCS in March 2007, to collaborate and develop a long-term partnership aimed at conserving local wildlife and the broader ecosystem, and embark on measured land use planning programs.

USG GRANT PROMOTES PARK PROTECTION

¶16. (U) To support the new partnership, the U.S. Government committed substantial financing through a 3-year, USD 12.6 million USAID grant initiated in November 2008. The "Conservation of Biodiversity across the Boma-Jonglei Landscape in Southern Sudan" program is being implemented by WCS, and has four major components: a) strengthen the capacity of GOSS to sustainably manage the area's natural resources; b) develop land-use, zoning, and resource management plans; c) improve monitoring, ecotourism development, and other sustainable resource management activities; and d) improve the livelihoods of indigenous communities by creating economic opportunities that are sustainable.

GOSS GRANTS UAE "ECOTOURISM INVESTMENT

¶17. (U) While generating tremendous publicity for Southern Sudan's wildlife resources, international press coverage of the survey results also attracted the interest of investors from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). According to a letter from the GOSS Ministry of Presidential Affairs, a subsequent visit by GOSS President Salva Kiir with the President of the UAE resulted in an agreement to grant a major land concession - estimated at nearly 6,200 square miles - to Al Ain National Wildlife Establishment. This concession was

KHARTOUM 00000911 002.2 OF 002

formalized in an agreement on "The Development and Management of Tourism in Boma National Park and its Environs" between GOSS and Al Ain, and signed in July 2008. It grants a 30-year concession to Al Ain to construct an eco-tourism development project in Boma National Park. The agreement spells out stringent guidelines that give the Wildlife Ministry control over all development in the park.

¶18. (U) More specifically, the agreement stipulates that all construction activities will require review and approval by the Ministry of Wildlife, as well as the completion of thorough environmental assessments for all activities. In addition, the agreement grants the Ministry strict control over tourist visitation to the remote park, which can only be reached via aircraft.

SEVERE VIOLATIONS THREATEN PARK

¶19. (U) The area has recently attracted international media attention once again when, on July 9, 2009 "The Economist" published an article that reflected growing concerns about both the GOSS concession, as well as the real attraction for tourists to Al Ain's development. According to the article, "Some conservationists wonder if the visitors may be looking for big-game trophies, despite a general ban on hunting in the south."

¶10. (U) There has been internal debate within the GOSS Ministry of Wildlife in recent months with some claiming that Al Ain has already violated critical terms of the agreement. This is made all the more important by the fact that the concession is located in the center of a particularly sensitive migration corridor in Boma National Park.

¶11. (SBU) Correspondence with the Minister of Wildlife Conservation and Tourism from the Bureau of Wildlife Conservation, highlighted

several key clauses of the agreement that Al Ain is allegedly violating. Specifically, the Bureau asserts that Al Ain has undertaken extensive and large-scale construction activities without assessing the potential impacts on the sensitive ecosystem, and without any approval or oversight from the Ministry; including a two kilometer long airstrip that can facilitate international flights, numerous accommodation facilities, and a wide access road and extensive supporting road networks which cut through pristine wildlife areas.

WILDLIFE BUREAU RECOMMENDS SUPERVISION

¶12. (SBU) In addition, the Bureau argues that the terms of the agreement are being violated due to large aircraft flying in and out of the park without the knowledge or supervision of the Ministry or park authorities. The Bureau recommends that the Ministry of Wildlife suspend Al Ain development until a land-use plan is completed to better delineate core protection areas of the park, in order to preserve critical migratory routes and breeding areas of wild animals.

¶13. (U) COMMENT. In light of these current developments, the Mission is concerned that, if violations continue to go unaddressed by GOSS, the Al Ain development will severely undermine U.S. Government-supported interventions to preserve Southern Sudan's world-class natural resources, and to develop sustainable use of the resources for tourism and livelihoods. USAID's program of "sustainable" ecotourism in the Boma-Jonglei landscape is implementing a model that will improve the livelihoods of the area's indigenous populations without destroying the very resource that can make the area an international draw. END COMMENT.

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